

Growing in the Snow by Tikal Tyrant

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Summary: On a snowy day, a walk home under Eddie's umbrella turns into an exploration of Eddie and Richie's relationship. A Richie Tozier/Eddie Kaspbrak one-shot.

Growing in the Snow

A/N: Just another Richie/Eddie one-shot with lots of fluff. I hope that you enjoy!

Growing in the Snow

"An umbrella for the snow?" Richie called out, running up the sidewalk that led to Derry Elementary School. Eddie turned around at the sound of his voice and hurriedly faced the school again as if he hadn't heard him. Richie quickly fell into step with him. "An umbrella for the snow? Doan ye know a umbrella is fo' da rain?"

Not only was Eddie carrying an umbrella, but he was wearing a slicker (much like the slicker George Denbrough wore that past summer, but only Bill would have a fleeting thought about the similarity) and rain boots. Richie only donned a thick wool jacket. Large, puffy snowflakes swirled and fluttered down, clinging onto it. The snowflakes landed softly on the wet sidewalk and disintegrated immediately, and when they landed on Eddie's brown umbrella, they rolled off in drops.

"When the snow melts, you'll wish you had an umbrella," Eddie replied smartly.

"Who ever heard of using an umbrella for the snow? Especially snow like this." Richie turned his head up and stuck out his tongue. He inhaled a few puffy flakes into his mouth, and when he brought his face back down, his thick lenses were obscured by large water droplets. Eddie laughed at this, and convinced, he closed his umbrella and stuck out his tongue as well.

The snow that morning was plentiful, but the flakes were thin. By 2:45pm, students were released to a much slushier sleet that fell harder and melted on contact. *Cripes, I can't walk home in this* Richie realized, stepping hurriedly back inside the school doors after two seconds of being bombarded. He brushed the rapidly melting pellets off his shoulders and out of his messy hair. Other kids left the building with hoods or bags over their heads, and others braved the nasty weather as if it were a crisp, clear day. Richie hitched his jacket

up over his head and was preparing to make a mad dash out the door when the clack of the pointed tip of Eddie's umbrella against the linoleum floor indicated his arrival.

Eddie, who had learned to wait a bit before leaving the school after numerous incidents of being shoved to the ground by the crowd, was struggling with getting his bookbag on his back. When he did get set to leave, he saw Richie at the double doors practically leering at him. Leering, yet with an apologetic grin.

"What are you waiting for?" Eddie asked with uneasy suspicion.

"What would it take for a guy to get an escort under that there umbrella?"

It didn't take much apparently, Eddie thought as he struggled to keep under the umbrella with Richie's trying to occupy the full range of protection. Snow-slush fell at an angle, making racket on the umbrella and stinging Richie's face and Eddie's hands.

"What happened to whoever heard of using an umbrella for the snow?" Eddie called up, struggling to hold the umbrella high enough for himself and the taller boy.

"Well, now I've heard of it," Richie called back down.

They were practically jogging now, exerting more energy trying to stay equally under the umbrella than anything else. Because Richie's house was closer, they made their way there. Eddie went in first, pulling off his rubber boots and setting them sopping by the door. He hung his slicker on the wall hanger. Richie leaned the umbrella against the wall, where it slid and clattered on the hallway floor. Eddie cringed at the wet mess it left, himself being conditioned to shake as much water off in the doorway before bringing an umbrella inside. The thought reminded him of something Richie had told him over the summer about shaking after peeing. "If you don't shake off each time, you can get cancer." Of course, he had only made this outrageous claim to tease Eddie.

"I'm covered in snow," Richie said, holding his arms out.

Eddie looked at him and snickered. He may have been covered in snow at one point, but now he was standing in the hallway with his wool jacket looking like a wet animal holding onto his back. Drops fell from his hair in some places and sat in other places like dew on grass. His glasses were fogged to the point of blindness, and when he took them off to smear his sopping shirt over the lenses, Eddie could see those dewdrop-like spheres clinging to his eye brows as well. He also had a fine mist-mustache, and Eddie wiped his own face in case he did, too.

Richie moved his eyes to the blurry motion, and Eddie froze under the gaze of those icy-blue orbs. It occurred to Eddie that maybe this was the first time he had looked at those eyes without the distortion of the lenses. As they were now, they looked so clear. The moment ended too soon. Richie put his glasses back on and smiled, unaware of Eddie's mystified stare.

Quickly, Eddie broke his gaze, dropping his eyes to Richie's chest. He smirked. "This jacket didn't do you much good," he said, stepping forward and taking hold of both sides of Richie's jacket, flapping them weakly.

Richie took the flaps from Eddie's grasp and shook them enthusiastically, flinging water. Eddie held his arms up and stepped back. "Stop it," he said, accidentally giggling. It was a giggle that made Richie's grin widen. There was something satisfying about making Eddie react, regardless of whether that reaction was positive or negative.

From the living room, Maggie Tozier called out, "Is that you, Richie?"

"Yeah," he yelled back. "And Eddie."

There was a shuffle, and Maggie leaned through the doorway into the hallway. "Hi Eddie. How are you?" Before he could answer, she looked at her son and gave a short gasp. "Richie, you're soaking wet! Get upstairs and change into something dry before you get water everywhere." She smiled to Eddie again and added, "Make yourself at home, Eddie," before slipping away, back into the living room.

Eddie couldn't help but think that if his mom had seen him like that,

she would have jumped him, trying to change his clothes herself. Instead of worrying about him dripping water on the floor, she'd worry more about him catching cold or pneumonia.

"Come on," Richie said, motioning for Eddie to follow him upstairs. Apparently he was going to hang out for a bit.

They entered Richie's bedroom, and immediately Richie shed his jacket and tossed it on the round stool at the foot of his bed. It landed heavily, and he was left in a nearly dry button-down with a funny wet bar sticking to his chest and stomach where the jacket didn't cover. He started to leave it on, but thinking better of it, he stripped down.

With a start, Eddie turned his head away. It was only after sitting down on the bed with his face to the floor that he realized how unnecessary his reaction was. He saw guys change in front of him all the time before gym class. Thirty-two hyperactive sixth graders, and Richie was the most hyperactive of all. But this was different. It was the way that he was changing in near silence that made Eddie nearly blush like some perverted voyeur. Blush and... breathe in thinning strands. The labored breathing startled him. Concerned him was more like it. Why should he be having a fit right now?

Eddie knew why. He wasn't an idiot. It was written all over the underside of the Kissing Bridge. But Eddie's concern wasn't so much about AIDS FROM GOD. It was more about this unexplainable notion that such feelings were strange. Strange and unnatural. And...

(I'll blow you for free!)

Eddie shuddered, pulled his aspirator from his front pocket, and shot it down his throat.

"You okay, Eds?" Richie asked, sliding a dry button-down over his skinny arms.

"Yeah," Eddie sighed. He stiffened when Richie sat cross-legged at the foot of the bed. *Dammit Richie, button your shirt. What are you doing?*

Now Richie may not be the most serious kid in the world, but he

could tell that something was weighing on Eddie's mind. Eddie had that serious expression that almost made him look like an old man. A rather short, soft old man. He had first noticed the look that past summer, when everything went down. He wasn't as delicate as he seemed.

"You thinkin' of something?"

Eddie's storm cloud eyes wavered side to side. Then he looked up at Richie, and his face showed doubt. "Naw," he said.

That look of doubt hurt Richie more than anyone would know. It was apparent that despite the maturity of the rest of the Losers, Eddie still couldn't think of Richie as anything more than a class clown. Not someone worthy of serious conversation. Not someone worthy of trusting with your innermost turmoil.

For Eddie, it was more a matter of his own uncertainty. His own embarrassment and not wanting to bother Richie with his problems. It'd just be annoying to Richie. He'd probably laugh. Things would probably get awkward. Then they'd stop hanging out. No more sharing umbrellas. No more reading comics together. No more cheek pinching.

God how he hated the cheek pinching. Which reminded him.

"Are you ever going to stop calling me Eds?"

"That depends," Richie replied.

Eddie was surprised he hadn't simply said no. "Depends on what?" Eddie asked, genuinely curious. He had reverted from an old man back to a little boy. A boy who looked two years younger than his peers, at least. Or maybe just one year younger now. He had gone through a growth spurt early this year that had gone unnoticed until Richie watched Eddie bump his head on some of the lower rafters of the Kaspbrak attic a few times. One of those times was so hard he had to get a medical strip.

Richie stood up and grabbed Eddie's upper arms. Eddie jerked violently before allowing Richie to stand him up, and he held his

breath as Richie positioned him so that their toes touched. Eddie's eyes widened at the close proximity (he saw that Richie's chest was rather skinny and concave, but somewhere in Eddie's mind he almost admitted to liking it). His cheeks were starting to burn, but Richie was still holding him by the upper arms and turning him slightly from side to side like an indecisive person trying to hang a picture.

Unable to take the growing heat anymore, Eddie jerked his arms free. "Knock it off! What are you even doing?"

Richie plopped his open palm on Eddie's head, and Eddie's gray eyes shot up curiously. At first he thought that he was being petted. Then Richie moved his hand across the air and to the top of his chin. He sneered. Just half a year ago, Eddie only came up to his chest. It was almost crazy how easily gradual changes like growth can go unnoticed.

"If you ever get taller than me," Richie said, "I'll stop."

Eddie crossed his arms and plopped onto the bed moodily. "Fine, I will get taller than you. My dad was tall, so I will be too," he said with a pout. Truth is, the next year, Eddie would get close to reaching Richie's height, but that would be the end of Eddie's growing for a while. In the end, he'd only outgrow Beverly by an inch. Richie laughed and reached out to pinch Eddie's cheek, but Eddie punched his arm away hard enough for Richie to have to rub it, which he did with even louder laughter. "If you don't stop pinching my cheeks, one day I'm really gonna hit you hard. You'll be lucky if I don't break your glasses. Got it, foureyes?"

These words could have been a low blow, but the Losers could practically say whatever they wanted about each other. They could even use the same words as the bullies (not Henry and his boys anymore, but bullies come and bullies go) and it'd just be friendly teasing. Richie just laughed and nodded, but Eddie knew that it was a nod that meant, "Yeah, yeah. Whatever. Like that'll happen." More than anything, those threats with that expression just made Richie want to pinch his cheeks even more. Or hug him like some big teddy bear.

Yeah, Richie knew about AIDS FROM GOD and HOMOS GO TO HELL

too. He knew about his mom's aunt who pulled a gun on her cousin after she admitted to being a lesbian (so girls can be gay, too, Richie had discovered at ten years old. Though he supposed it should have been obvious). That's right. He knew that being gay was wrong because it was always something people admitted. Like you admit a lie.

Oh, but Richie didn't think he was actually gay. He had gotten plenty of scoffs and sneers from girls who caught him staring at their chests. In fact, they'd usually catch him before he even knew he was looking. Breasts had a strange magnetism for eyeballs. But Eddie was a special case. He didn't just make Richie's eyes misbehave. He made his heart and brain misbehave, too. Richie didn't have time to deny that he felt the same way about Eddie as he had felt about Julie Graves in the third grade (she was in the fifth). He probably didn't even have the mental capacity to notice before the love-bud bloomed. But that early attraction was different. With Eddie, it was more like how Ben felt about Beverly. It was that serious.

It was almost crazy how easily gradual changes like growth (and love) can go unnoticed.

Eddie had broken out of his stern pout just enough to put a hint of apology in his eyes. Richie almost had to bite his lips to keep from saying anything. *Why do you have to be so damn cute, Eds? Huh? Why do you have to make me a gaymo? I love you, Eddie. Do you know that?*

But even when he managed to hold his tongue, his mouth was still a traitor. Before he had time to remember why it was a bad idea and why he hadn't done it before, Richie was sitting beside Eddie and planting his Trashmouth on Eddie's sweet, asthmatic lips.

It only lasted for a second, but it was the first genuine kiss either of them had had. Now, Richie may have not had the mental capacity to notice his budding love, but Eddie sure did. He had spent restless nights trying to correct this problem. He had talked plenty of sense in his head, but clearly the love-bud had no interest in sense. When Richie pulled back, Eddie fell into a deep series of screeching gasps. He grasped at his right pocket, but it was empty. So was his left pocket.

"Oh shit, Eddie. I'm sorry," Richie said, groping at the covers for Eddie's aspirator. "I frocked up. Fuck."

Eddie wheezed and groped around on the blanket, finally grasping the hard plastic that had hidden itself under a fold. He crammed it in his mouth and gave two sprays, then gave a groaning sigh of relief.

"What were you thinking, Richie you idiot?"

Richie felt a twinge in his chest. "I dunno-"

"Why do you think it's so fun to tease me?" Eddie yelled, gripping his aspirator in his right hand and the cover in his left. "You just get a kick out of messing with my head? Richie Tozier Gets Off a Good One! Har-de-fucking-har!"

Richie bit his lip. He remembered why acting on his feelings for Eddie was a bad idea now. Eddie's pained voice pained Richie in return. Eddie's face was red, and Richie was sure it was from anger. But that was only half true. The other half was embarrassment. Not even a giddy sort of embarrassment. Just an ashamed and nervous embarrassment.

"I don't like messing with you," Richie said cautiously, which wasn't entirely true either. He just hadn't meant to mess with Eddie right now. "Gee Eds, I really didn't mean-"

Eddie glared fiercely at Richie, a storm raging in his eyes as he reared his fist back, making Richie cover his face. But Eddie didn't hit him. His fist hovered by his ear for a second, then dropped. He wanted to say that had been his first kiss, but considering what had happened in the sewers that past summer, it seemed almost silly to put any stock in kisses.

"I'm sorry," Richie said.

Bashfully, once again apologetically, Eddie peeked at Richie. "Don't be. I don't want you to be sorry. I'm not sorry. Are you really sorry?"

Richie shrugged. "If you're not sorry, I'm not sorry."

"Can..." Eddie could feel his throat straining. He gripped his aspirator

warningly. *Not right now, please.* His throat eased up a bit. "Can we... again?"

He prepared himself for an explosion of laughter, but Richie just punched his glasses up the bridge of his nose and cleared his throat. He didn't say anything. In fact, Eddie thought he actually looked nervous. Eddie's mouth twitched, and he licked his lips quickly. They moved closer, and they kissed again. Just a peck. Then another peck before moving apart.

Eddie shot a preemptive spray down his swelling throat. Richie let out a nervous laugh. "I didn't mean to steal your breath." He said it like a joke, but his voice was shaking. His whole body was.

"Heh, yeah," Eddie said with a forced smile. Then the corners of his lips drew down, and he looked up at Richie with hesitation. "Is there something wrong with us?"

Richie wanted to laugh and ask what he meant, but that would have been playing dumb. He already knew. "Aw Hell. There's something wrong with everybody."

This time, Eddie was the one who laughed, and Richie was relieved to know that he had actually said something right.

"Yeah, especially you, Richie," Eddie giggled, and Richie found this so cute that he had to pinch Eddie's cheeks. He did, and Eddie howled out. Richie wrapped his arm around him and pulled Eddie close. It was an incredibly warm and comforting embrace for the both of them.

After that, the two spent their evening like any other evening. They listened to music and read comics. They told jokes and Eddie stayed for supper. Maggie Tozier drove him home afterward. Richie and Eddie's affectionate moment had been short, but they both returned to the memory often. It would still be another year or so before either gathered the courage to continue where they left off today. But that night, the two boys lay in their respective beds, grinning madly to themselves with the knowledge of what they had done together. It was something they had both wanted. It was the start of something they would never want to end.